

A History of the Native Woodlands of Scotland, 1500–1920. By T. C. Smout, Alan R. MacDonald, and Fiona Watson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005. xiv+434 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, footnotes, bibliography, and index. Paper \$32.00.

General interest in Scottish woodland has a long history, stretching back into the nineteenth century and beyond. In more modern times, both scholars and a general readership have been well-served by a number of important forest-related publications including magisterial books on native pinewoods (H.M. Steven & A. Carlisle, *The Native Pinewoods of Scotland*, Oliver and Boyd, 1959) and medieval hunting forests (J. Gilbert, *Hunting and Hunting Reserves in Medieval Scotland*, John Donald, 1979).

During the last fifteen years virtually all new historical research and writing on this topic has been single-handedly driven by Professor T.C. Smout, ably assisted by a number of research assistants, two of who have co-authored this book. In fact, since 1997 Professor Smout has both contributed to and edited a number of collected editions on woodland (T.C. Smout (ed), *Scottish Woodland History*, Scottish Cultural Press, 1997; T.C. Smout & R.A. Lambert (eds), *Rothiemurchus: Nature and People on a Highland Estate, 1500-2000*, Scottish Cultural Press, 1999; T.C. Smout (ed), *People and Woods in Scotland*, Edinburgh University Press, 2003). Clearly, then, this volume has been built upon and benefited from these preceding volumes. *A History of the Native Woodlands of Scotland, 1500–1920*, however, amounts to so much more than the sum of its preceding parts.

The book contains thirteen chapters, ranging from woodland produce to the industrial economy, 1830-1920. Each chapter can be read in isolation but they each also form an integral part of a wider-ranging story that travels from the hanging of goat entrails on trees for forest offences to the importance of wood ants in woodland ecosystems. At the centre of this story is mankind and how people have protected, used, and abused woodland in Scotland for generations.

Needless to say, the authors have employed selectivity, both in terms of subject area and in terms of coverage. As far as the latter is concerned, it would have been impossible to do a detailed analysis of the whole of Scotland in only one volume so they have tackled regional case-studies, including an examination of the MacDonald woods on Skye, 1720-1920, and an excellent re-appraisal of some rascallion Irish entrepreneurs in the pinewoods of Glenorchy between 1721 and 1740.

If this book has a weakness it is in the first chapter that assesses woodlands in Scotland before 1500. While this is very informative, the authors have not done justice to the information embedded in the surviving Scottish ecclesiastic cartularies relating to the utilization of medieval woodland, both in terms of assarting and in the division of woodland resource between competing exploitative monasteries. This, however, is a minor quibble.

In more general terms, the book has been carefully produced and the reproduced images and maps are excellent. If truth be told, not many academics can claim to construct prose in a style that is simultaneously learned and accessible to a non-academic audience. The authors of this book have succeeded on both counts and it rightly deserves to be ranked as ‘required reading’ for many years to come.

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